

*Background Material
for 18 October*

12.11.06

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Approved For Release 2002/09/11 : CIA-RDP80B01676R001800010013-0

October 18, 1962

USIB should address itself to the following problems at once and be prepared to report at a meeting Friday morning.

The question is to analyze the effects of probable courses of action which might be taken by the United States. The courses are three:

1. To accept MRBM and other offensive capabilities in Cuba as a fact of life and do nothing about it.
2. To initiate a total or limited blockade under a declaration of war against Cuba.
3. To take military action ranging from:
 - (a) Take out of the identified MRBMs.
 - (b) (a) plus concurrent take out of Cuban air capabilities -- MIGs, IL 28s, etc.
 - (c) (a) plus (b) plus take out of SAM sites and cruise missile sites.

There are two alternative approaches to 2 and 3 above. They

- (a) Confrontation of Khrushchev with our knowledge of what is going on and determine his willingness to cease and desist and unravel the situation prior to action by us and then taking actions under 2 and 3 if, and only if, Khrushchev's responses are unsatisfactory. Similarly, some approach might be made in the form of a warning to Castro.
- (b) To act under 2 and/or 3 without warning to Castro or Khrushchev on the theory that Presidential statement and Congressional Resolution, etc., constitute a warning.

USIB's opinion and appraisal of all aspects of the above contemplated actions are requested.

Samuel reaction to our action

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In making these studies, careful attention should be given to the question of the military significance of MRBMs in Cuba. There is a body of thought that since a nuclear stalemate exists, the installation of MRBMs in Cuba does not alter the equation. It is thought that the Soviets do not now or at any time in the future, have the capability to strike us with such complete devastation that we cannot strike back at them with unacceptable damage to them. On the other hand, it is likewise felt that we cannot strike the Soviet Union in a surprise attack with assurance of so destroying their restrike capability that they cannot strike back at us inflicting unacceptable damage to us. Therefore, it is thought that the nuclear offensive power is "in balance" and will remain so until some defensive mechanisms come into being. In view of this, the question is raised as to whether MRBMs in Cuba alter this particular equation.

This question should be analyzed as part of USIB's study without reference to the political implications. As a collateral part of the study USIB should address itself to the following:

- (a) The political implications which involve enhancement of USSR prestige throughout the world and particularly on Latin America and Africa by "getting away with the installations"
- (b) The probability that this will turn out to be a rallying point for the Communist minorities throughout Latin America and conversely result in a loss of prestige to the United States, because the Soviets got away with this;
- (c) The effect on our position throughout the world and our friends' appraisal of our courage and determination in such troubled areas as Berlin, Nationalist China, Korea, etc, if we "buckle under" to an established offensive capability in Cuba, which is a situation we have repeatedly said we would not tolerate.

John A. McCone

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Approved For Release 2002/09/11 : CIA-RDP80B01676R001800010013-0

October 15, 1962

MEMORANDUM TO USIB MEMBERS:

A discussion among the principals on October 18th indicated a probable decision, if any action is taken against Cuba, to initiate a limited blockade designed to prevent the importation into Cuba of additional arms. To do this the United States would make such statements concerning a condition of war as is necessary to meet the legal requirements of such a blockade, but a formal "declaration of war against Cuba" would be avoided if possible and resorted to only if absolutely necessary.

The blockade could be extended at our discretion to include POL and possibly a total blockade if Castro persisted in the offensive build-up.

Continued surveillance would go forward so that we would know of the situation within Cuba as it evolved.

warning The blockade would start possibly on Monday, following a public announcement by the President which would include a display of photographic intelligence, persuasive notification to our Allies among the Soviets and the Cubans, but with no prior consultations with our Allies or any Latin Americans unless it proved necessary for legal reasons to assemble the OAS and secure the necessary approval to invoke the Rio Pact.

More extreme steps such as limited air strike, comprehensive air strike, or military invasion would be withheld awaiting developments. The possibility of more extreme actions has not been dismissed, however initiating such actions was considered unwise.

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The argument in favor of the blockade was principally that it initiated a positive action which could be intensified at our will or could be relaxed depending upon evolving circumstances. Soviet reactions are expected to be severe and very probably involve a blockade of Berlin and a widespread propaganda effort, however it was considered that we could have some control over the extent of Soviet reaction and in the event of a confrontation, would be negotiating from a position of positive action which would be intensified at our own direction.

The obvious disadvantages are the protracted nature of the operation, the difficulties of sustaining our position in world opinion because of our own complex of foreign bases and our deployment of offensive missiles and nuclear weapons and finally, the action does not reverse the present trend of building an offensive capability within Cuba nor does it dispose of the existing missiles, planes, and nuclear weapons if the latter now exist there.

Positive military action initiated now appeared ^{un}desirable because of the impact of current and future world opinion, the spectacle of a powerful nation attacking by surprise attack a weak and insignificant neighbor, engagement by the United States in a "surprise attack" thus giving license to others to do the same, the indefensible position we would be in with our allies, and finally, the price to us of extreme actions of which the Soviets appear capable of executing.

The above course of action is by no means unanimous. The opinions range from doing nothing on the one hand, to immediate military action on the other. There exist differences of opinion as to the handling of Khrushchev, Castro, NATO, the OAS and Latin American states; and finally, a question of the "declaration of war" awaits legal opinion; also differences exist concerning the intensity of the blockade with some advocating a more comprehensive blockade which would include POL at the very start.

I would like guidance from USIB members for my use in further discussions which are to take place commencing at 11:00 a.m., October 19th, and will probably continue throughout the week end.

John A. McCone